

Mortonhall: notes

Points of interest:

1. **Old postwar camp.** Remnants of a postwar camp for displaced people from Eastern Europe, including Ukrainians and Poles. It was a common feature for WWII camps to be placed within woodland in an attempt to disguise them from the air, to make them less vulnerable to observation and attack. Due to housing shortages, the only way to accommodate the vast number of immigrants in the immediate post-war years was to place them in the camps recently vacated by the army.
2. **Huts of old army camp.** The family vacated Mortonhall in 1939 and the property was taken over during the war as an army camp for the training of the Royal Engineers.
3. **Stenhouse Burn.** Previously a Ha-ha.
4. **Arboretum.** Maps dating from 1852 onwards show ornamental planting on the west side of the Main House and south of the Walled Garden. This area included walks, a bowling green and fountain, plus a pigeon house and icehouse also in the vicinity; a tree belt followed the Stenhouse burn. The arboretum still contains cypresses, thuyas, hemlocks, yews, Norway spruce, *Cedrus deodara*, *Cedrus libani* (very large), and large mixed broadleaved trees including cut-leaved and purple beeches.
5. **Old main driveway?** The original fortified house of Mortonhall had a moat and drawbridge. There seem to be no visible remains today. So where was it? Early maps (especially Roy c1750) show the old house as near the current house, with a short driveway coming directly from the west.
6. **Walled Garden.** Knox's map of 1812 shows a Noblemen's Seat among irregular enclosures, with a walled garden, and new sinuous driveways.
7. **Former kennels.** The Estate, in its hey-day, contained many out-buildings:- West Lodge on Braid Road (adjacent to Buckstane Farmhouse); East Lodge, Howden Hall Road (now demolished - made way for new crematorium entrance in 1960s; South (Shepherd's) Lodge on Frogston Rd East (also demolished). Still extant are the Factor's House; the Stables; Square dovecot adjacent to stables; Meadowhead Farm, E of golf course, now used as riding stables; as well as kennels, both here on SW side of walled garden and also at NW corner of campsite.
8. **Main House.** The present Mortonhall House (a somewhat austere tall Georgian mansion) was established in 1769 by the 7th baron. More recently, in 1949, Mortonhall House was leased to Edinburgh University, when it was used 'for a Marxist experiment in communal living'. The house was occupied by scientists at the new Agricultural Research Council Unit of Animal Genetics and their families during the late 1940s and early 1950s. This unusual arrangement whereby staff and their families were housed together in Mortonhall soon led to frictions. The communal living arrangement proved to be a turbulent experience and became immortalised in Edith Simon's fictional book *The Past Masters* (1953) and her short story entitled '*Murder at Mortonhall*'. Since then the main house has been converted into offices and flats.